

**VETERANS BENEFITS AWARENESS TASK FORCE**  
**VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER MEETING**  
**Monday, March 18, 2002— 9:00 AM**  
**Kansas City Armory**  
**7600 Ozark Road, Room 107, Kansas City, MO**

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In attendance: **Lt. Governor Joe Maxwell**, State of Missouri; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Ronald Taylor**, Associate Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant to the Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director Veterans Benefit Awareness, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Reginald Bassa**, Commissioner, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Joseph Mossey**, Lt. Governor's Office; **James (Jim) Whitfield**, Western Area Coordinator MO Military Funeral Homes; **Paul Connors**, VFW, Dept. of MO; **James Hughes**, State Jr. Vice Commander MO, VFW; **John Burgess**, **Lloyd Knox**, **Karen Etzler**, **Bud Hawes**, **Ronald Sharp**, **Richard Johnston**, **Robert Blum**, **Clyde Collins**, Veterans Service Officers, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Ken Swearingin**, Director Bloomfield Cemetery, Missouri Veterans Commission

- I. **Opening Remarks** – Ronald Taylor, Associate Director opened the meeting by explaining to the attendees the Veterans Benefit Task Force purpose and direction. Missouri is ranked 44<sup>th</sup> in compensation benefits and 22<sup>nd</sup> in pension benefits. During a Joint Veterans Affairs Committee meeting last year, Lt. Governor Maxwell offered assistance and committed to the Veterans Commission in joining efforts to raise veteran benefits awareness. This is an enormous opportunity for the Commission to reach a large number of veterans who may qualify to receive VA benefits.
- II. **Task Force Mission** - Joe Maxwell, Lt. Governor, State of Missouri, thanked attendees for coming and expressed his appreciation for the work the Veterans Service Officers do to provide service to the veterans of the state of Missouri and his satisfaction with the action plan the task force has taken. The Lt. Governor heads 15 Boards and Commissions. He serves as Chair of the Senior Rx Program within the Office of Advocacy and Assistance for the Elderly, Advisor for Early Childhood Programs, Chairman Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force and Advisor for Special Health, Psychological, and Social Needs of Older Minority Individuals Commission. Lt. Governor Maxwell's two priorities are to raise awareness of possible VA benefits and to increase Veterans Service Officers workload. The task forces mission is communicating, setting deadlines, and taking action. The task force will raise awareness about programs that already exists. He stated the need of commitment from Veterans Service Officers to make the task work mission succeed. "Our Veterans deserve the benefits they deserve", commented the Lt. Governor. The Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force is not creating a new program nor do we want to raise false expectations. There are \$335 million dollars worth of VA benefits to distribute and our task is to get the veterans the benefits they earned. The purpose today is to consolidate and coordinate the workflow process and develop a system. Lt. Governor Maxwell asked the officers how can the task force help them in their jobs and what they will need to assist them in the increase workload the task force will be producing. Without the commitment of the Veteran Service Officers this mission will fail. It is important to work together to complete the task.
- III. **Update-** Ron Taylor
  - a.) The task force is looking for resources for money to help pay for paid ads to help on promotional items to increase awareness. VA statistics indicate the average amount paid in VA benefits per veteran is \$1,267.00 per year in Southeast MO. The average amount paid in VA benefits per veterans in suburbs of St. Louis is \$402.00 per year. The lower per year is where we need to target awareness. We need Veteran Service

Officers to help identify key people and areas that we need to try and reach. We think that one of collateral benefit of raising awareness of all the money that you can bring into the state and showing that we are doing it, we should get a more sympathetic hearing from legislators. We will meet with the legislators to explain what the task force is doing.

- b.) Do cooperative efforts with the Senior Rx Program. The Senior Rx Program will be bringing in seniors and we will be sharing methods and participating in Health fairs that the Senior Rx Program will promote.
- c.) In addition the task force will be conducting Veteran Benefits Supermarkets throughout the state. Supermarkets have been used in other states and proven to be successful. The task force will try to have 10 Supermarkets within the next year. Commitment are already for 3 in St. Louis area and some out state. Community involvement is needed.
- d.) State Fair the Commission will set up a booth to promote veteran benefits and have officer onsite.
- e.) Participate in Veterans Week in Branson, MO
- f.) Partnership with Service Organizations (VFW, American Legion, DAV) in assisting with CBOC's.
- g.) Looking at toll free number and voice activated call forward system to handle increase in phone calls. Expectations of 15,000 to 16,000 phone calls after program roll out.
- h.) The Commission is developing a Foundation for large sums of money donated from corporations to help fund program.

Lt. Governor Maxwell informed the officers the Senior Rx Program application forms include questions pertaining to veterans.

- 1. Are you a veteran?
- 2. Are you receiving Veteran benefits?
- 3. Health cost? Income?

Enrollment period for Senior Rx Program is April 1 to May 30. If 65<sup>th</sup> birthday is within that year, enrollment period will be January 1 to February 28 each year. Eligibility requirements will be based on age and income. The program is planning health fairs with on site screening. The Program will be sharing data with the Commission. Information will be provided to the Veteran Service Officers on the Senior Rx Program.

#### **IV. Question and Concerns**

Power of Attorney limits access to Veterans Service officers if the Commission is not listed on POA. Access to the VA system would help to check status updates on claims. Commission will meet with St. Louis Regional VA office to determine whether service officers could have authority to access information on the system. Immediate solution Ron will ask St. Louis Regional office if we can fax power of attorney to them and they can enter into system at that time so that officers may view records.

Concerns about areas where veteran service offices have overflow of clients coming in versus offices with fewer clients. These high areas in some instances assistance is needed in helping to complete the paperwork. Ron recommended working together with the use of Veteran Service Organizations officers and VA Service Officers to assist with these high areas.

Lt. Governor stated we should utilize our resources and meet the needs in rolling out this program.

Medical information is required in filing claims with VA. We are not getting the information from the doctors for medical claims due to private records.

CBOC's opening would be a good time on media attention to get the word out about the VBATF program.

Staffing concerns on increase in workload, possible assistance of retired officers who have experience in completing paperwork was suggested.